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C O N F I D E N T I A L ADDIS ABABA 003475

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: ETHIOPIAN HELICOPTERS FOR UNAMID

REF: ADDIS 2944

Classified By: Ambassador Donald Yamamoto for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

11. (C) Prime Minister Meles told the Ambassador on December 31 that Ethiopia is perplexed by UN delays with Ethiopia's deployment to Darfur. Meles argued that Ethiopia will abide by any decisions made by the UN because Ethiopia is committed to Darfur operations. This is born out of deep concerns over the potential impact on regional stability. Meles noted that Ethiopia was first informed by the UN that night vision capability was a requirement for Ethiopian helicopters. But if the UN is now saying this is not a requirement, then Ethiopia will abide by that decision. Ethiopia has already deployed part of its force to Darfur and awaits further instructions from the UN. End Summary.

ETHIOPIA WILL ABIDE BY UN GUIDANCE

12. (C) Ambassador raised in a private meeting with the Prime Minister on December 31 Ethiopia's plans to deploy helicopters without night vision capability. The Prime Minister underscored the importance of Ethiopia's commitment to be a part of Darfur operations because of Ethiopia's deep concern that instability in Darfur will affect Sudan and regional stability and, in turn, Ethiopia's stability. Prime Minister Meles said that in this context, Ethiopia has, and will continue to, abide by UN direction and guidance.

13. (C) Meles reminded the Ambassador that Ethiopia wanted to deploy earlier in 2008 but was delayed by the UN. There were also additional requirements by the UN for Ethiopia to deploy additional helicopters as well as a caution from the UN that Ethiopian helicopters did not meet UN standards, particularly for night action. This required night vision capabilities for its pilots and some modifications to its helicopters. Meles said that if the UN is now stating that night vision capability is not required and that other standards do not have to be met, Ethiopia will abide by the UN direction and is prepared to deploy its forces. Meles explained that Ethiopia's forces will not be able to conduct night operations, but felt from the beginning that his forces were adequate to meet the mission. He again emphasized to the Ambassador that Ethiopia is not delaying nor seeking to delay deployment and noted that he has already deployed some of his forces.

UN VISIT TO ADDIS

¶4. (C) Ambassador reviewed with the Prime Minister the conclusions of the UN-US-UK team that visited Ethiopia in early December. The Prime Minister and Ambassador agreed that in a future UN visit a briefing for the Prime Minister would be welcome.

COMMENT

¶5. (C) The Ethiopians have been flexible and responsive to Darfur operational requirements. This Embassy facilitated the State Department Africa Bureau's training and equipping of Ethiopia's Darfur battalion, for which the Ethiopian Government expressed its appreciation in a highly publicized press event. We recommend to the UN that it brief the Prime Minister in its next visit and that it relay directly to the Ethiopian Government the UN position on Darfur operations, requirements and other demands. Ethiopia is not opposed to expanding its force. End Comment.

YAMAMOTO